

WOMEN OF TRACHIS (for HOMEFRONT)

TUTORIAL: Description of how to play *Kairos*

Tutorial Question: How can a play written over 2000 years ago still be relevant today?
scene_first

SUMMARY: Summary of events until this point of the narrative

Hercules has been on a war campaign in Eurytus for years. On this day, his wife, Deianeira worries that a foretold prophecy states that Hercules will either be victorious on this day and they will lead peaceful lives forever, or he will die in agony. She sends their son, Hyllus, off to search for his father.

Hercules's messenger, Lichas, arrives with prisoners from the war campaign, and news that Hercules has indeed been victorious. One of these prisoners, the beautiful Iole, is revealed to be the princess of Eurytus and Hercules's new war bride. In her fear, Deianeira decides to send Hercules a robe (as a gift) laced with the blood of Nessus the centaur, who, in his dying moments, gave his blood to Deianeira and claimed that it would turn Hercules back to love with her, should he fall out of it.

However, Deianeira soon realizes that this was the centaur's last trick. His blood is actually poison, and, in her desire to reignite her husband's love, Deianeira has destroyed him. As Deianeira curses herself for what she's done, Hyllus returns, having found his father.

Summary Question: Hyllus blames his mother for his father's impending death. When has someone made assumptions about your motivations? What did you do about it? s1

HYLLUS

Oh, Mother!

Either die
or be some-
one else's
mother.

Or, better yet,
go find another
heart to replace
the wicked one
that rattles around
inside your chest.

DEIANEIRA

And what have I done
to deserve your hatred?

HYLLUS

You have
murdered
my father,
your husband,
this day!

DEIANEIRA

(cringing with fear)
Oh, what a horrible
thing to say, my son!

HYLLUS

What I just said
will soon be true;
I speak as a witness,
so I should know.

DEIANEIRA

What are you saying,
my son, and who has
accused me of such
a despicable deed?

HYLLUS

I heard it
from no one,
but saw it with
my own eyes.

Question: How do you deal with the unintended consequences of your actions in a constructive way? s2

[Summary: Hyllus found his father, Hercules, in the midst of a victory ceremony enjoying the spoils of war. As Hyllus celebrated finding his father alive, Hercules' trusted messenger Lichas arrived with the poisoned robe.]

HYLLUS

Hercules stretched
out his arms and
slipped on the death-
robe, Slaying twelve
bulls without blinking,
the first of hundreds
that were being led
to the slaughter.

At first, his voice
was filled with joy,
as he sang to the gods
in celebration, taking
pleasure in the sacred
fabric, as it draped
ever so elegantly
over his shoulders,
but when the fat began
to fuel the fire, and
the flames blazed
high above our heads,
Hercules started to sweat,
causing the robe to cling
to his skin, as if suddenly
nailed flat by the hand of
an unseen craftsman, and
the first wave of pain shot
through his body, breaking
his bones, eating his flesh,
as the venom raced through
his veins like a hateful snake
constricting him within.

He called out for Lichas,
who was blameless and yet

deeply afraid, and demanded
he explain how he came
to deliver the poison-soaked
robe, and poor Lichas, who
knew nothing, said it was a gift
from you, and you alone, that
he was just following orders.

When Hercules heard these words,
a violent spasm racked his body,
pulverizing his lungs, causing him
to bring up blood.

Then, in one of the quiet moments,
between the bitter convulsions, as
he cursed your marriage and spoke
spitefully of the disastrous deal he
made with your father, the whites
of his eyes strained to focus through
the low layer of smoke that clung
to his burning flesh, to make out
my face, which by then was stained
with tears from crying in the crowd.

And when he spotted me,
he called out, "Come closer,
Son, and do not turn away
from my suffering, even if it
means you will die at my side.
Hoist up my body and carry it
where no man will be able to
witness what is becoming of
me and, if you have pity for
your father, do not let me die
in this country. Take me away!"

We loaded his broken body
into a ship, according to his
wishes, and sailed straight home,

which was no small struggle, as
he shrieked and shook each time
the poison seized him in its teeth.

This is the whole story,
Mother, of the crime
that you committed
and for which you will
surely be condemned,
as the avenging Furies
hunt you down and,
in the name of Justice,
punish you from above.

I curse you, Mother,
for what you have done,
murdering the noblest
man to ever walk
the earth, whom you
will never see again,
so long as you live!

Question: Which character do you identify with in this moment? s3

[Summary: After some time, the nurse of the house comes outside to tell the chorus that Deianeira has died and that Hyllus has found her body.]

THE NURSE

Hyllus began
to whimper and moan,
for he now understood
that he had cursed her
in anger, hastening her
death, having learned
from the servants about
how she killed her
husband in ignorance,
blindly following the
centaur's instructions.

Then he wept,
as a little boy
weeps when he
misses his mother,
lying along-
side her corpse,
kissing her face,
and cradling
her in his arms,
confessing that
he had wrongfully
accused her of
a crime she did not
willfully commit,
lamenting the loss
of both parents,
mother and father,
in the span of one day.

That is how it is
inside the house.

Anyone who counts
on tomorrow is a fool.

There is no tomorrow
until you've safely
made it through today!

Question: The narrator here says that “Anyone who counts on tomorrow is a fool.” What would you prioritize if you never counted on tomorrow? s4

[As Hyllus holds his mother, soldiers loyal to Hercules bring his dying body into town outside their house. With only his son and these soldiers around him, Hercules awakens in agony.]

HERCULES

My son,
prove your-
self to be my
true-born son.

Curse your mother's
name and drag her out
of the house by her hair
with your hands, then
hand her over to me,
so that I may see you
suffering more at the
sight of my broken
body than at the rightful
defilement of hers.

Come on, my son,
you must find
the strength within
yourself to do this
for your father.

Take pity on me,
for I am worthy
of your pity,
writhing with pain
and weeping
just like a woman,
which no man
can ever say he
witnessed me
do in the past.

I have been stripped
of all my virtue, of
everything that makes
me a man, and reduced
to the state of an animal.

Come closer, son.

Stand right here
beside me and see
what has become
of your father
in his misfortune.

I will expose you
to the truth of my
affliction, pull back
the sheets so you
can see the source
of my misery.

Open your eyes
wide all of you.

Look!

Take in
the damage
done by
the disease
to my
tormented
body, gaze
upon a
terminal
patient
in pain.

Ahhhhhhhhhhh!
Ahhhhhhhhhhh!
I am wretched!
Ahhhhhhhhhhh!

Question: What part of Hercules' struggles do you relate to most? Why? s5

It climbs

my spine
up over my
shoulders,
ripping through
ligaments.

It liquidates
the tissue
within my
once-invincible
arms, with
which I over-
powered
the great lion
of Nemea,
who terrorized
the countryside
unchecked,
afraid of no man.

With these arms
I defeated
the mighty Hydra
of Lerna, and
the savage army
of centaurs,
who in their double-
nature, half-stallions—
half-men, trample
their enemies with
cloven hooves
in stampedes of
enormous force,
knowing no laws.

With these arms
I destroyed
the boar of
Erymanthia,

and Cerberus
the three-headed
hound down in
Hades, the awful
offspring of Echidna,
mother of all monsters.

With these arms
I strangled the serpent
who guarded the golden
apples in the shadows of
Hesperia at the end
of the earth.

I shouldered
the weight of
countless other
labors, facing
down the worst
of adversaries,
but was never
defeated...
until now.

All my strength
has been reduced
to rubble, my
nerves have been
shattered, my joints
dislocated, my
muscles shredded.

I am a shell of
my former self.

I am in ruins.

**Question: Why do you think Hercules dwells on his past heroics in the midst of his pain?
What would you think about? s6**

HERCULES

I, who was
the child of
the noblest
of mothers.

I, who was
worshiped
by some
as the son
of Zeus,
taking my
rightful
place in
the sky
among
the stars.

Know this,
above all.

Even if my life
means nothing,
even if I cannot
move another inch,
I will punish
the woman who
did this to me
in spite of my illness.

Bring her to me,
so that I may teach
her the meaning
of suffering and
show her how,
in life and in death,
I deal with those
who do me wrong.

Question: If you were in pain and thought you knew who caused it, would you want revenge? s7

HYLLUS

Since in your
silence you have
given me a brief
moment to speak,
please listen closely,
father, in spite of
your illness, to what
I am about to say.

It is only right for
you to hear me out.

Give yourself over
to the sound of my
voice, without
struggling against
it in anger or
hacking up hatred;
unplug your ears
or you will never hear
how your rage has
been displaced and
how you have made
a grave mistake.

HERCULES

Say whatever
you need to say,
then shut your
mouth, my son,
for I am sickened
by the sound of
your voice and,
in my agony,

cannot follow
the logic of
your words.

HYLLUS

I am going to tell
you about my mother
and how she came,
in ignorance,
to make a mistake
and what has now
become of her.

HERCULES

You utterly evil
excuse for a son;
you dare to speak
of the woman
who slaughtered
your father in
earshot of me.

HYLLUS

It would be wrong
to remain silent about
the state she is in.

HERCULES

And what about
the injustice she
has done to me?

HYLLUS

Two wrongs do
not make a right.

Hear what she
has done this day.

HERCULES

Speak, but do not
betray yourself
to be a traitor with
your words.

HYLLUS

I will say it.

She is dead.

She died only
moments ago.

HERCULES

(laughs)

Your words
fill me with
wonder
and joy!

HYLLUS

You would not
think such things
if you knew what
really happened!

HERCULES

I do not like
the sound of
this, but tell
me what you
think I need
to hear.

HYLLUS

She tried to do
good, but slipped,
and did evil instead.

HERCULES

So you think
it was good
to murder
your father?

Despicable.

HYLLUS

She tried to make
you love her again
by dosing you with
a potion, after laying
eyes on your bride.

HERCULES

And what great physician
gave her this medicine?

HYLLUS

It was Nessus,
the centaur, who,
long, long ago,
taught her how
to re-ignite your
love with a drug
distilled from
his blood.

HERCULES

Oh.

Question: How important is the truth in someone's final moments? s8

Oh.
It is over.

I may as well be dead already.

I see now how my life will end.

The light will fade away forever.

Go gather your brothers
and your sisters; go find my
poor old mother, Alcmena,
who uselessly went to bed
with Zeus, only to give birth
to a son who would one day die.

Bring them all here to my side,
so they can all hear my last words.

HYLLUS

I am sorry,
but none of
them are here.

Your mother now
lives at Tiryns along-
side the ocean
with some of your
children; the others
now live in Thebes.

All of us who are here,
father, will do our best
to assist you, to carry out
your last wishes, and to
make you comfortable.

Question: What do you think it means to Hyllus that he is the only one here? s9

HERCULES

Well, then listen
to what must
be done, son.
You are
standing at

a crossroads.

It's time
to show
the world
what you
are made of,
exactly what
kind of man
you have
come to be.

You have long
been called
my son; now
prove yourself,
once and for all,
to be my son.

Long ago,
my father
showed me
the future
and told me
that my life
would never
be ended by
anyone alive,
but that I would
be murdered by
a shade who
lived in Hades.

So Nessus
the Centaur
has killed me
from the grave.
The prophecy was true.

I die at the hands of the dead.

Question: What does having an explanation in the form of the prophecy mean to father and son? What would an explanation mean to you? s10

HERCULES

So now that we
know, son, let's
take action; you
must stay by my
side and never be
pushed away by
my words, no
matter how harsh.

Try not to
provoke my
anger and
work with me
on this last labor,
for the ancient
law is sacred
that requires
a son to obey
his father.

HYLLUS

Father, it makes
me uneasy to agree
with your request, but
I will do as you ask.

HERCULES

First, place your
hand here, right
against mine.

HYLLUS

First, tell me
what compels
you to make me
swear an oath.

HERCULES

Give me your hand quickly,
and do not defy my orders.

HYLLUS

Here is my hand.
I will do as you say.

HERCULES

Swear now
on the head
of Zeus who
gave me life.

HYLLUS

How can I swear
until I know what
I am swearing to do?

HERCULES

Swear to do
the deed
of which
I speak.

HYLLUS

With Zeus as my
witness, I swear.

HERCULES

Pray to be
punished if
you do not
live up to
your oath.

HYLLUS

I will not
need to be
punished,
but I pray
all the same.

Question: How do you think Hyllus' last conversation with his mother influenced his decision to do as his father asks? s11

HERCULES

Do you know
the towering
mountain of
Oeta, sacred
to Zeus, king
of the gods

HYLLUS

I know it well,
for I have gone
there many times
to make sacrifices.

HERCULES

Take my body
into your hands,
lift it up with
the help of your
friends, and
carry it there.

Then, chop down
a few of the ancient
oaks firmly rooted
in the earth and
gather branches from
the wild olive groves,
piling high the wood
onto which you
will toss my body.

Then take a flaming
torch made of pine
and set it all ablaze.

Do not let me
see you stifle
cries or choke

on tears of grief.

Do this work
without emotion,
if you are indeed
my son, or I will
lay in wait for you,
even in death, and
visit you with end-
less suffering from
the underworld.

HYLLUS

Father, what
are you saying?

What are you
asking me to do?

HERCULES

What must
be done. Or
be someone
else's son.

HYLLUS

I ask you again,
father, what are
you asking me
to do—be your
murderer, stained
with the pollution
of your blood,
and hounded by
Furies forever?

HERCULES

I am asking you
to be my doctor.

Heal this affliction!
Cure my disease!

HYLLUS

You want me
to heal your body
by setting it on fire?

HERCULES

If you are afraid
to see this through
to the end, then
at least do the rest.

HYLLUS

I will carry you to Oeta.

HERCULES

And gather the wood?

HYLLUS

I will do everything
that you have asked,
except light the fire.

HERCULES

That will be fine.

HYLLUS

It is wrong to argue
with the afflicted,
but it is hard to listen
the twisted logic
of your words.

HERCULES

It seems this boy
has no intention
of doing what his

dying father has
asked of him.

Question: How does pain change your behavior? s12

Know this, son.

You will be cursed
by the gods if you
do not give me what
I am rightfully due.

HYLLUS

This is impossible.
No matter what
I decide to do,
I will be wrong.

HERCULES

Yes, because you
you think it is right
to disobey a father.

HYLLUS

If I am loyal
to you, then
I am disloyal
to myself and
my sense for
what is right.

Is this the lesson
that I am to learn?

HERCULES

You will learn
the meaning
of loyalty
by granting

happiness to
a dying man.

HYLLUS

Then you order
me to do this
with full under-
standing of what
you are saying?

HERCULES

Yes, I call out
to the gods
to bear witness
to my words.

HYLLUS

Since you have
shown these deeds
to the gods to be
yours, not mine,
then I will do what
you have asked,
and then no one
will ever be able to
question my loyalty.

HERCULES

In the end,
you have
chosen well,
my son.

Question: Hyllus says “You have shown these deeds to the gods to be yours, not mine.” Does that justify what he’s being asked to do? s13

HERCULES

Now quickly
do this one last
thing for me.

Take my body
and place it on
top of the pyre,
as I have asked,
before another
wave of pain
comes crashing
down upon me.

Lift me up
right away;
do not wait
another second.

This is the rest
I have long been
awaiting, an end
to my labors and
to mighty Hercules.

Question: If Hercules is a father who loves his son, why has he been acting the way he has?
s14

HYLLUS

Hoist him upon your
shoulders, friends,
showing compassion
for what has happened,
witnessing the brutality
of the gods toward
one they called a son.

No one can say what
is to come. It is heart-
breaking to helplessly
look upon this man's
suffering, and shameful
for those who cause it,
but hardest of all on one

who suffers this affliction.

Question: What do you hope someone would do for you if you were suffering? s15

ENDING: Telling players thank you for playing and to know that they are not alone across time.

Thank you. Those who wish to, feel free to stay and further discuss the text and any questions you marked during play. scene_last